VERSES OF VARIED LIFE

MACKENZIE BELL

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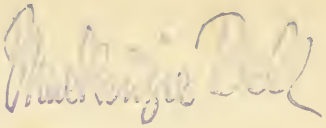

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VERSES OF VARIED LIFE

BY

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AUTHOR OF 'THE KEEPING OF THE VOW.'

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MISCELLANEOUS PIECES.

MISCELLANEOUS PIECES.

THE RIVER OF THOUGHT.

THE strong River of Thought has an aye-changeful course,
Yet for ever it springs from the same changeless source
Where God-given Truth in its grandeur doth reign,
The regal physician of Man's mental pain.

Sometimes in high joyance it glideth along
With glamour of music and gladness of song :—
While borne on its bosom gay pleasure-boats sail,
Rejoicing a while in the light laughing gale.

Sometimes like the stream which has sunk under
ground,
Yet still keeps its course mid the darkness pro-
found,
Unknown and alone it must hold on its way,
Till emerging at length in the full light of day.

Sometimes like the mountain's fierce torrent it
flows,
And all that can hinder its progress o'erthrows ;—
Possessing the power of immutable right,
And strong in the strength of invincible might.

Crass Ignorance surely succumbs to its sway,
As boldly it takes its all-conquering way,—
While keen-sighted Knowledge appears in its train,
The sweetener of pleasure, the soother of pain.

Unceasingly hated by many, yet some
Unceasingly love it, though oft they are dumb.
Yet whatever betides, and wherever it flows,
'Tis the noble who love it, the weak who oppose

Great River of Thought! our strange world doth
not know
The evil you check, and the good you bestow :—
May Time teach the lesson, 'twill then comprehend
How well and how often you prove its true friend.

A RALLYING SONG.

DOUBTING, trusting, hoping, fearing,
Are we in this world of wrong—
Yet whilst o'er Life's ocean steering,
Let this be our rallying song—
Aye, in sadness
And in gladness,
Nobly act, in God's strength strong.

When oppressed by deep soul-sorrow,
Joy departing like a dream,
Let us still some brightness borrow
From this heart-sustaining theme—
Aye, in sadness
As in gladness,
Nobly act, whate'er may *seem*.

When to stain our honour tempted
Some ignoble end to buy,
From such cowardice exempted
Let us resolutely cry—
Evil sow not,
That it grow not,
Nobly act, for God is nigh.

For, befall what may, with Conscience
Satisfied shall we be blest ;
So mid all Life's strange mutations
Still this motto must be best—
Aye, in sadness
And in gladness,
Nobly act, and *trust* the rest.

WHISPERING WINDS.

WHISPERING winds strange musings carry
To our hearts as they sweep by :—
Thoughts that often thrilling tarry
Though the winds may wailing die.

To the sailor, watchful pacing
On the deck of ship at sea,
Bring they dreams of danger facing,
Mid the tempest's mockery.

To the exile, hoping, fearing,
Wandering on an alien strand,
Bring they memories endearing
Of his much-loved Father-land.

To the weary heavy-hearted
  Often bring they thoughts of peace,
Of the peace where, pain departed,
  Woe and weariness shall cease.

Sometimes bring they only sorrow
  To the stricken in their train,
Imaging a dread to-morrow
  Which will but augment their pain.

Bring they unto some new pleasure
  And each trace of care destroy,
While to others yield a measure
  Of distress that mars their joy.

Yet these forms of varied feeling
  In this feature all agree,
That o'er every soul is stealing
  Thought of an Eternity.

HELPFULNESS.

BEHOLD a fine tree growing in a field,
Apart from any other, and alone,
With nothing to preserve it or to shield
It from the wind, yet it is ever known
To thrive as well as trees whose lot is thrown
In sheltered woods, saved from the wintry blast.
And first from it in spring is heard the tone
Of singing birds; for, while its branches last,
It is a blessing where its lonely lot is cast.

How well if often thus with man it were,
For surely cheering others on their way
Would wondrously relieve our ceaseless care,
And dissipate the gloom of Life's drear day,
By teaching us that Love will truly pay
An hundredfold again what we bestow
Upon our brother toilers; none can say
The blessings that we reap when thus we show
Our sympathy for men by sharing in their woe.

THE SOURCE OF SONG.

WHAT maketh the true poet sing?
Is it sense of deep injuries thrown
On the weak by the strong, which sting
His heart, till to song he is prone?

Is it sight of some beautiful lake
All aflame with the dying sun's rays,—
O'er whose breast the acacias shake
Soft tresses of feathery sprays?

Is it thought of some beautiful form
That fays well might deign to assume;
Displaying with ardour full warm,
How noble is youth's early bloom?

Is it thought of his dear mother-land,—
The deep longing that she be supreme:
Aspiration as loyal as grand,
Which to sons should be more than a dream?

Is it pleasure in physical health—
The supreme unacquirable dower,
Far greater in blessing than wealth,
And almost as mighty in power?

Is it simple desire to excel?
Or ambition that's highest and best,
Which longs among mankind to dwell,
To show by true life what is blest?

With such things the poet must strive,
And sometimes they impel him to sing,
Till in fortunate hour they may drive
Him for aid to re-touch his lute's string.

But the primary cause which impels,—
More resistless than aught of these things,—
Is this: that within him there dwells
A soul which but lives when he sings.

A STORM SONG.

THE surges in anger are beating
  On the rocks and the shingle-strewn shore,
And though with a hiss aye retreating,
  They come in fierce fury once more.

Most sternly the billows are breaking
  In wreaths white with purest of spray,—
Still further their great wrath awaking,
  As forward they dash on their way.

The wild wailing wind that is blowing,
  The dreariness far out to sea,
The feelings that come without knowing
  In truth what their nature may be.

All these, and much more now oppress me
As musing I gaze on the strand :—
Yet though in some sense it distress me,
How noble a storm is,—how grand !

The ships in the bay are so swaying,
Their cables can scarce bear the strain :—
Their beams with the water are playing
While sailing is utterly vain

As the gale is against them completely ;
The rain how it ceaselessly falls,
Clouds scud o'er the sky, ah how fleetly !
And harsh are the sea-birds' shrill calls.

* * * * *

The storm is now spent and departed
And yet its effects still remain,—
Two mothers are made broken-hearted,
Their boys will not greet them again.

How wondrous it is that Creation
  Is aye in perpetual strife,
And shows not, for man's emulation,
  How calmness should regulate life!

Can it be that when Man in his madness
  To Evil at first became thrall,
All Nature was forced with sore sadness
  To join his unspeakable fall?

A SONG FOR POLAND IN 1878.

Ah, how cruel the thraldom and bitter the bonds
Of our wretched and down-trodden nation!
Not a throb of our hearts but in anguish responds
To the sight of such dire desolation:
And in scarce-spoken words we are heard to declare
Woe hath made us wellnigh broken-hearted,
Dark and dreary the prospect; dear Poland, despair,
Since thy liberty now hath departed.

Other peoples get freedom, while we in the dust
Alone and forsaken are lying;
Ever lower and lower continually thrust,
Men's love of their country fast dying.
While the Government check with malicious intent
Any change for our good which is started.
Dark and dreary the prospect; let Poland lament,
Since her liberty's light hath departed!

No! Revenge on the tyrants who work us such ill
Mid their bland hypocritical prating:[1]—
And arouse ye, undaunted, remembering that still
Retribution is certainly waiting.
Let our nation awake which now slumbering lies!
Not a moment be longer down-hearted!
For rejoicing may come if proud Poland arise,
And her freedom return which departed.

[1] The writer had in his mind when writing these lines the many protestations of the Russians in favour of Freedom on commencing the war with Turkey.

WHAT ALL MAY DO.

Our past life must perish,
Our future arise,
And oft what we cherish
Most speedily dies:—
There are griefs for whose changing
We helplessly long,
Though we feel our arranging
Is hopelessly wrong:—
But if we live rightly,
We have in our power
To gather up brightly,
From each fading hour,
A thought-woven treasure
Of justly-earned joy,
Whose bountiful measure
No grief can destroy.

WAITING FOR THE DENTIST.[1]

THOUGH many dismal years I've been
To dull old Care apprenticed,
The worst of the small woes I've seen
Is—waiting for the dentist!

How dreary is the cheerless room
In which you bide his pleasure,
The very chairs seemed steeped in gloom,
And sorrow without measure.

As if so wild mute-molar grief,
So uncontrolled its swelling,—
That its fierce tide had sought relief
By deluging the dwelling.

[1] As lines have recently been added, this piece is here reprinted.

What though of literature a store
Is lying on the table,
You only think the books a bore;
To read you are unable.

What from the window, though, perchance,
You see forms full of graces,
They merely make you look askance,
And think how sore your face is.

On many chairs and sofas, too,
More martyrs round you languish,
You glance at them, they glance at you,
And give a groan of anguish.

You deem it hard, their turn arrives
Before you in rotation,
Or they wax wroth that your's deprives
Their case of consolation.

You muse upon the ruthless wrench
Which buys a tooth's departing—

Or how the stopping-pangs to quench,
In which you may be starting;

Or haply on these ivory chips
Harsh Nature may deny you,—
But which the 'golden key' equips
Man's genius to supply you.

No words your mood of mind express,
'Tis a state devoid of quiet,—
In which pain, pleasure, and distress
Mingle in hopeless riot.

Yes, though much sorrow one must know,
While to old Care apprenticed,
The greatest unheroic woe
Is—waiting for the dentist.

REWARD OF PARLIAMENTARY DOCILITY.

A Brother to a Sister.

My dear ——

As words though sincere,
Are at best but 'small beer,'

My party (in office) have made me a peer:
A step which the press I do hope won't deem queer,
Nor question its justice, nor slightingly sneer,
(What I've done to deserve it is not very clear,
Save doing as bid, when divisions were near—
Thus causing our Whip's drooping spirits to cheer,)
But be that as it may, I subscribe myself here
John Anthony Snobbins,

(*now*) Lord Abinmere.

SONNETS ON THE POWER OF THOUGHT.

In Converse.

WHO can predict what power for distant days
Toward good or ill lies centred in a Thought
Which flashing through the mind unmeant, unsought,
Is uttered suddenly in careless phrase?
Ill that no future good can stingless make
In the effects wrought by its blighting force;—
Great good that floweth from the all-good Source,
The Fount from which all purity we take.
Sometimes thought's mighty aims in secret lurk
And labour silently, their aim concealed,
Until the crisis comes; sometimes revealed
They zealously pursue their varied work.
Reflecting wisely thus may we be taught
Not rashly to express each flippant thought.

In Writing.

If so it be with speech, how much the more
With written language! Speech perforce decays,
'Neath Time's destroying touch. Ere many days
Gone is mayhap the fruit which wise words bore:
That written doth remain,—its import not
Dependent on frail Memory's brittle thread
To keep it safe, or number with the dead
At her capricious will. None can say what
Momentous destiny may be assigned
To some brief trivial letter. Authors too
Who lightly pen, to please the public view,
Works strenuous and yet stained with vice, will find
A day of certain retribution come
When all their loud excuses will be dumb.

In Art.

The power of Thought in art! Who has not
found
And marked its subtle influence? We see
Its magic in a picture wondrously,
Whose canvas by its presence made renowned
Bears witness to the fact. When we behold
A stately building, and perceive the skill
Which shapes each column at the sculptor's will
Till it attains at length th' exquisite mould
That he has long desired. When we are thrilled
By some soft cadence rippling on the ear
Of sweetest music,—as though far and near
With a celestial choir the air were filled:—
Then, and then always, may we truly find
What power of thought lies in the human mind!

In Proverbs, &c.

The power of Thought in Proverbs !—oftentimes
We find its glittering essence centred there,
All crystallized, as if indeed it were
A bright and flawless diamond.—Silly Rhymes
Which oft we hear repeated are not dross
Entirely,—here and there rare pearls of thought
Appear upon their surface, genius-wrought ;
Had they not been, we must have borne a loss.
O mighty power of Thought, it may not be
Within the sphere of any man to find
Thought undiscovered by a brother-mind,
Though deep and boundless is thy shoreless sea :—
And yet thy potent pathway is the groove
In which, by thee propelled, the change-girt world
doth move.

IN MEMORY

OF

The gallant men who fell fighting at Isandhlwana, South Africa, in a surprise by the Zulus, 23d January 1879.

STEADFAST they stood,—nor feared to face the foe
Though twenty-fold outnumbered,—calm, alone
They bore the brunt of battle on them thrown,
And bravely strove against the ignoble blow:
Yet doubtless mid the din of deadly strife
Came softened thoughts of home and loved ones dear:
And many a prayer was prayed in faith sincere
That they might meet anew in deathless life.
We mourn their loss (a wound Time scarce can heal)—

Yet we are proud such courage doth remain
Among us. May we soon efface the stain
From England's flag,—while more and more we
feel
A sense of joy, which in our hearts will stay,
That Britain still can boast these 'heroes of to-day.'

Feb. 22d, 1879.

DECEMBER DAISIES AND DECEMBER DAYS.

December 3d, 1881.

Ah, how the sight of fair untimely flowers
Awakes a subtle sentiment, and fills
The soul with quiet pleasure. Something thrills
Our being to the core and softly showers
Strange yearning thought upon us. When the close
Of a December day is stirless, mild
As is this twilight hour, we are beguiled
By its seductive softness: and there grows
(As one by one from out the placid sky
The tranquil stars appear), the half-formed doubt
Whether the scene be real. For without
A question kindly Auster cannot try
To bring a greater boon. Joys that arise
All unexpected we most keenly prize.

VIOLET.

'A TALE of sorrow'? Ay, I know,
One fraught with sharp and sudden woe,
A story of undoubted truth,
Beclouding all my sunny youth;
And though with arbitrary sway
Stern Time has turned my locks to grey,
Though furrowed wrinkles on my brow
Proclaim that I am agèd now,
Though signs of trouble you may trace
In the expression of my face,—
Though trembling is my bloodless hand,
And scarcely under due command,
Though devious is my tottering tread,
Though bent with weight of years my head;
Though my whole look, my gait, my air,
Show sad though common signs of care,
Yet fadeless, unforgotten, clear,
To mental sight its scenes appear.

Of sisters I had only one
As playmate,—brothers I had none.
A lovely rose-lipped child was she,
Dear as my very life to me;
Now, almost mournful in their birth,
Rise thoughts of these dead days of mirth;
I see her framing daisy-chains
While I assist, and for my pains
Receiving, as repayment meet,
The chaplet from her when complete.
And as o'er both the restless years
Resistless rolled their hopes and fears,
They only bound us by a bond
More durable and just as fond.
O happy he who thus hath known
Such union ere his lot was thrown
Amid the changes and the strife
And heart-wounds of the world's strange life!
Even dreams of such communion to the bruised
and wearied soul,
Are ever found the truest balm to make it
strong and whole.

* * * * * *

Yes: years rolled on, with little change
For us in Duty's daily range.
My sister—Violet her name,—
In beauty grown, remained the same
In character. Her guileless grace,
Almost a proverb in the place,
To those she loved exceeding fond,
And gentle unto all beyond.
Ever for right most firm and strong,
Aye valiantly rebuking wrong,
And seeking in whatever mood
To shun the ill and do the good.
Her figure pleasing as her mien,
Her summers numbering seventeen;
Her rippling hair of darkest hue,
Her eyes not oft describèd blue,
But some rare tint,—and pen can ne'er
Portray the radiance glowing there.

There was a youth whom Violet thought
Worthy her love, and he had caught
A kindred flame of chaste desire;
A truer love could none require,
Parents and friends were satisfied,
And well they might be; all descried

That union of such virtuous worth
Would prove the happiest on earth.

Our lawn stretched to a deep broad stream:
On summer eves 'twas like a dream
To watch the gentle moonbeams play
Across its wide and glittering way;
To trace the tremor of the trees
Slow moving in the soft night breeze,
And as on either side they bend
Each towards the other as a friend
Talking with comrade dear,—to think
These trees, converse they, on this river's brink?

On the stream's tide we kept a boat,
Not often did it idly float
In peace near to the summer shore;
For one alone could ply its oar
With pleasure. In the sultry noon,
With bees and birds and trees in tune,
How sweet to glide in it, and screen
'Neath willows from the scorching sheen;
Thus Violet full oft had been.

And so one day—the heat was great,
And, we conjecture, to abate
Its force, she to the water dipped
To lave her hands,—in quickly slipped
The boat's light oar ; that then she tried
To reach it, bending on one side,—
Till gone too far to stay, 'twould seem,
She slid into the treacherous stream.

Too late an oarless boat was found,
And near, a maiden, soul-less, drowned,
In whose fair face and gloomless mien
Death in his gentlest form was seen.
One lover more o'erwhelmed with grief,
Whose tears as yet brought no relief,
Who, righteous and untouched by guile,
Ne'er sought another maiden's smile ;
A brother who through all his coming years
Will strive to dry his brethren's bitter tears.

'A common story, this,' I hear one say,—
'Not worth the telling.' Nay, stern critic, nay ;

Each man's heart-tragedy, if truly told,
Will interest some, although to most 'tis cold
And commonplace. No case of mental pain
Which crushes not, but strengthens, can be vain.

HEART ECHOES.

WHILE the sunlight's glory dying
Tints the pebbly sea-kissed strand,
And the night-chilled breezes sighing,
See the shadows wrap the land—
Faint, yet powerful, sad, yet tender,
Come fond thoughts of vanished years,
Waking sweet soul-thrills that render
Joy that is akin to tears.
Ah, how real are these dreams!
And the past the present seems.

Visions of a gentle maiden
Beautiful and pure as fair,
And of eves whose gales love-laden
Wanton with her auburn hair:

For 'twas when soft summer's beauty
Made the earth with gladness rife
First I felt, as well as duty,
What deep joy might be in life:
Ah, how real are these dreams!
And the past the present seems.

Memories are swiftly thronging
Of that span of treasured past,
When the joy to me belonging
Was, alas! too bright to last:
Still do I remember clearly
What I asked with trembling voice,
And her words, 'I love you dearly,
And am proud to be your choice.'
Ah, how real are these dreams!
And the past the present seems.

We were 'wedded, happy-hearted,'
And our future path seemed bright,
Who could tell we should be parted,
Love's glad sun obscured in night?

Yet before another spring-tide
Shed abroad its myriad charms,
Bitter blow! my darling left me,—
Dying calmly in my arms.
Ah, how real, fraught with woe,
Rise these dreams of long ago!

Still amid my sore dejection,
In its comfort ever new,
Comes the soothing, sweet reflection,
To each other we were true.
For some end God sendeth sorrow,
And when this at length is gained
I shall meet my bride in Heaven
Happy, holy, and unstained.
There no longer fraught with woe
Rise the dreams of long ago.

THE POET'S POWERLESSNESS.

UNTO the poet's mental eye how clear
Appears a scene he would in wise words weave
Into the varied texture of his verse!
A scene it is of beauty unsurpassed,—
Of hoary mountains whose gigantic peaks
Approach the sky,—of a fair wooded vale,—
And of a rushing rivulet, whose sound
Re-echoes in his ears. A simple theme
Methinks to handle, yet at once he finds
How hard it is to choose the magic words
With which to make the spell he trusts will bind
The senses of his readers. Ever thus
He feels it in description,—also when
Depicting subtle feelings of the soul,—
Indeed in every subject meet for song:—
And so he feels that words are at the best
Most ineffective colours to paint well
A theme Imagination-glorified.

THE POET'S THOUGHTS.

THAT dotard soul I cannot comprehend,
Nursing no hope that, after many years,
His name should be preserved by other means
Than by an entry in the parish-books—
A man who harbours in his heart no hope
To be remembered in the unborn days
By some good deed accomplished, that should leave
A blessing and a benefit behind
To such as follow after.
Therefore now
I make this sacred resolution strong:
I shall redeem the time, and though the days
Are evil, yet it shall be my delight
To labour patiently: that when I reach
My goal of pilgrimage it shall be seen
That I at least have lived not all in vain.

Most men but live, as sacred Scripture saith,
'They eat, they drink, are merry, and they die.'
Few daily doings are of much account
In fifty years; then let my mind be set
On themes more fit to fill the soul of man.

THE OMNIPRESENCE OF POETRY.

THERE's poetry in everything,
If poets could but find
How best its subtle power to bring
To breathe upon the mind.

It lurks in all of Nature's store,
Alike on land and main,—
Where far from shore the breakers roar,
And on the quiet plain.

'Mid lofty mountains whose proud peaks
Appear to pierce the sky,—
In valleys where the farmer seeks
His busy tasks to ply.

'Mid scenes where babbling brooklets haste,
Engirt with flowery strand;
Where man's harsh turmoil makes a waste
Of erst a beauteous land

In mighty cities never dumb
With sounds of human life,
In villages where seldom come
Cares born of human strife.

'Mid friends and kindred everywhere,
In talks with those we love
When happy intercourse we share;—
In thoughts of things above.

Enwove with every feeling here,
Part of each joy and pain,
And permeating love sincere
Which never can be vain.

For Poetry's white hands can mould,
From all of Earth, pure leaven;—
And who shall say it will not hold
A noble place in Heaven!

FRAGMENT FOR MUSIC.

SOFTLY swaying
Are the flowers,
Scents betraying
'Mid the showers:
Gently moving
Are the trees,
Not reproving
The rude breeze.

Stars shine quiet
Though the storm's
Cloudlets riot
O'er their forms:
Moonrays mildly
Shed their light,
Though still wildly
Wails the night.

Mountains never
In their might
Care if ever
Lost to sight:
Plants must wither
And be lost
When comes thither
Biting frost.

Lower creatures
Scarce complain,
Nor their features
Change with pain;
Though Toil's burden
Ne'er is done,
Though no guerdon
Can be won.

At each season
Man makes moan
Though glad reason
Is his own;—

Notwithstanding
In his might
Earth commanding,
Wrong or right.

AN EVENING LANDSCAPE.

THE sun has set, and shades of evening close,
And all around there reigns profound repose;
And not a sound is heard, save when the breeze
In fitful gusts comes rustling through the trees;
And with its facile force their branches sways,
Like spectres moving in the moon's faint rays.

Ah, little change the face of nature knows,
Compared with life's oft-changing joys and woes,
And while poor, puny man departs as fast
As smoke is scattered by the wintry blast;
Its aspect will continue as of yore,
Till God decrees that Time shall be no more.

THE GUERDON OF TRIBULATION NOT INCURRED BY GUILT.

Oh say not that the world is sad
  Without redeeming feature,
Oh say not that the world is glad
  And holds no hopeless creature.

No life is ever filled with woe
  However great its sadness,
No lot can be all joy, although
  Most glorious seems its gladness.

With endless grief Life is not fraught,
  Nor with all bliss and beauty,
By varied influence we are taught
  How to fulfil our duty.

If happy be our lot assigned,
Of sorrow slight our burden,
Yet work on still with steadfast mind
Assured shall be our guerdon :

But a crown more rich to those shall be
From pain much less exempted,
If conquering the same foes as we,
Although more sorely tempted.

Thus every woe our souls within,
Though stern its present sadness,
If meekly borne, nor caused by sin,
Augments our future gladness.

BY-AND-BYE.

How oft our course in life is fair and gay,
And full of happiness from day to day;
But by-and-bye
Will bring some grief to cast its shadow on our way.

And then our path proves drear and dark as night,
For happiness, our sun, is lost to sight;
But by-and-bye
Will bring a time when all the way again grows bright.

Swiftly we travel through Earth's joy and woe,
Though rough our path, even there the flowerets grow;
And by-and-bye
Will bring a Restful Life where nought of change we know.

THE TRUE TREASURE.

LIVING brings us bitter sorrow,
Oft our hearts refuse submission,
While we yearn for a to-morrow
Which shall change our dark condition.

Love may bring us bitter sadness
When we find our love can never
More impart the sense of gladness
Which we thought it would for ever.

Joy may bring us bitter trouble,
Faith give place to Falsehood's anguish,
Hope may prove an empty bubble
When bereft of it we languish.

Worldly peace may bring us only
More of pain and less of quiet,—
And departing leave us lonely,
Battling in the world's rude riot.

Faith in man may bring delusion,
Oftentimes, when it has perished,
We discover with confusion
'Twas a phantom that we cherished.

Trust in God is truest treasure,
For of change it holds no leaven,—
If we live aright, its measure
Makes us holy, worthy Heaven.

A MOTHER'S SOLILOQUY ON HER NEWLY-DEPARTED CHILD.

My darling dead! Is all the long endeavour
For life-restoring vain? These wistful eyes,
So Truth-illumed and loving, will they never
Check by a glance again my futile sighs?

And shall I weep—although for him the gladness
Of human life for ever now is o'er,
And I am left with anguished sense of sadness,
A sadness which on earth is lost no more?

A cripple's lot were his, had he, remaining,
Striven to take his part in earth's stern strife,
Thus less of sinless happiness obtaining,
While feeling all the woe of mundane life.

The Master, seeing this, hath gently made him
Fitter among His ransomed ones to be,—
And day by day more fully hath arrayed him
In Christ's rich blood-bought robe of purity ;

So shortening the period of probation
Which otherwise were necessary here,
And raising him to an immortal station
Where maimed and suffering ones no tauntings fear.

Then shall I cherish an abiding sorrow
For him whom God in mercy takes away ?
Nay, rather let me muse on that blest morrow
Which joins our severed souls in bliss for aye.

A MATIN MELODY.

SWEET-VOICED songsters softly singing,
  Tell a new day is begun,
Its appointed portion bringing
  Of fresh duty to be done.

Last day's deeds have gone for ever,—
  Seems it not most passing strange
Their results remain, and never
  Can be touched by time-wrought change.[1]

Like a child who, pebble throwing
  From a streamlet's sedgy marge,
May not mark the ripples growing
  Though they one by one enlarge.

[1] It is possible to *reverse* the results of one day's deeds by the action of another, but the results of one day, as far as their effect on subsequent ones is concerned, are immutable.

So with influence increasing,
Widening o'er Life's mystic sea,
Are effects of actions,—ceasing
Only with eternity.

Many yesterday, unthinking,
Chose the path which leads to doom,—
While a few with souls unshrinking
Sought the road which cleaves earth's gloom.

Thus I muse with rapt devotion
Whilst the moments speed away,
Till I feel with meet emotion
All the issues of *to-day*.

LORD, TEACH US HOW TO PRAY

LUKE XI. 1.

A VAST enigma is our life
Without Thy guiding ray;
But Thou, who willed, canst calm its strife,
By teaching us to pray.

Prayer! true solution of the fears
And doubts along our way;
Whose influence, coming, sweetly cheers,—
What bliss it is to pray!

So when its mysteries distress,
And gloom enshrouds Life's day,
We plead that Thou wouldst make them less,
By teaching us to pray.

Dark is the path of weary woe,
Whilst in Earth's night we dwell,
Yet prayer will prove a sun to show
That still Thou leadest well.

ASPIRATIONS.

O FOR the feelings which abide
  Within the poet's mind,
That softly through his bosom glide
  And leave strange joy behind!

O for a little of the power
  Strong, piercing, pure and clear,
Which is his ever-potent dower,
  To reach the cold world's ear!

O for a little of the fruit
  Untinged with earthly leaven,
Not fame alone, nor vain repute,
  But something caught from Heaven.

Assurance that one's strain has cheered
Even though it be but one,
And shed on the dark path he feared
A little glimpse of sun.

EDGAR VANNING:

A SKETCH.

EDGAR VANNING:

A SKETCH.

PERSONS.

EDGAR VANNING.—*A young man near the close of a successful University career.*

ALETHEA STANTON.—*His betrothed.*

SCENE I.

Edgar's college rooms. EDGAR *seated at a table, holding in his hand an open letter, which informs him that he has succeeded in obtaining a much-coveted University honour.*

EDGAR.

TRULY a grand—a noble thing is life,
And with what joy a young man's life is fraught,
When, with a mind matured, a happy heart,
And resolution firm, he gazes forth
Upon the boundless world! He knows its snares,

Its pitfalls, and its quicksands; yet to him
'Tis given to avoid them. He is not
A foolish simple boy fired with strange thoughts
Of schemes impracticable, which should cure
The ills that are the bane of social life
In these our modern days.
Yet though he feels
Not youth's enthusiasm, nor its sense—
So all-absorbing that success is sure:
Though conscious of his failures and his faults,
Though knowing well his many weaknesses,—
Yet hath he self-respect, and knoweth too
His capabilities;—and hopes, ay, longs
By steadfast effort to effect some good,
Which shall, however small, still serve to show
That all his life hath not been barrenness.
But these are stern thoughts—let them pass—
there flows
The fresh untrammelled blood of buoyant life
Full joyous through my veins; my mind is clear,
My intellect is cultured, and I hope
My heart is happy. I have lately said
That life to such is gladness, let me not
Belie so recent words.

Ay, when I think
Of that great love which nestles in my soul,
Like a fair darling child of three years old
On her fond father's breast :—when it is true
That this love hath its guerdon, I should be
For ever gladsome : I remember well
The retinue of unreturning years
And many a day and hour which made them up,
Since she, who is my heart's desire, and I
Had our first meeting. We were children both—
Our parents were firm friends, and we were thrown
Often together : and as Dante loved
His Beatrice, so I Alethea,—
Save that his Beatrice was proudly cold,
While my Alethea was meek and kind ;—
And that as children we ne'er *thought* of love,
Although we loved so young we cannot tell
When love at first began. What subtle joy
It is to think that we are one in heart,
Together soon to tread Life's hardened ways !
What peace to me to think—a brief time past—
There comes to me a help-meet truly meet,
No speaker of sham sentiment, or words
Of mawkish weary platitudes, but one

Who strengthens me to do the right, who strives
To urge me on to goodly deeds and great.
O how refreshing oft it is to leave
My studies stern, and theories dim and cold,
To commune with reality so bright!
How sweet to bring at last the rich reward
Of lengthened brain-wrought labour, and to say
'Thy sympathy hath helped me to succeed.'

SCENE II.

A quiet summer evening. ALETHEA *standing in a secluded part of the garden of her home adjacent to an old plantation.*
TIME.—*A few days before the day fixed for her marriage.*

ALETHEA.

A FEW days more! Ah what a change for me,
A happy change! O kind few days that bring it —
A blissful change! Speed swift bright days that bring it,—
A change the sense of which thrills through my soul,
And makes it burst its bonds and soar in song.

A few days more, a few days more,
Ah what a change for me!
Then I shall enter through Love's door
To full felicity.

No more alone to bear one fear,
Or have an untold dread,
To leave my path, his sweet voice hear
And choose his path instead.

A few days more, then it will be
My duty to obey,—
A duty pleasant, joyous, free
As warbler's winsome lay.
I'll seek to do each fond behest,
To merit each fond smile,—
I'll strive to make his life more blest
His sadness to beguile.

He praises oft my sunny hair,
And lauds my peach-bloom cheeks,—
I would I were far far more fair
When thus my dear one speaks.
I feel unworthy him, and yet
He takes me for his wife,—
I'll yield to him—to pay my debt—
The service of my life.

How calming is this tranquil evening hour
Of sylvan solitude! The tall old oaks
Near which I stand have seen full many a year,
And sheltered many a maiden such as I
Beneath their branches, and in future time
Will shelter many more. My favourite flower,
The white convolvulus, climbs in the hedge
In spotless beauty as it used to do
In summers long gone by; and as it will,
Fanned by the breath of summers yet to come;
Nature is all unchanged, and yet to me
How changed it seems to-night! Despite my joy
A curious sense of sadness steals upon me,
When I reflect that guileless happy days
Of thoughtless youth are now for ever past,
That though life's grandest, highest, gift is mine,
A love returned tenfold, yet doubtless too
A share of sorrow is appointed me!

SCENE III.

A dull autumn morning. ALETHEA *at a window looking out on the depressing prospect.*

TIME.—*Several months after.*

ALETHEA.

THE blow is softened now by kindly Time,
And I can breathe again. On this the day
Poor Edgar starts for clearer sunnier skies
I first can ponder on these dreary weeks
Which lately heavily have passed away.
How different from the glad and trustful days
I thought they would have proved!
When first I heard
That he was stricken by a sickness sore,
A sickness nigh to death, I scarcely felt
Deep sorrow, but a paralysing pain
My senses dulled. I had no power to think,
And life seemed dead within me; but at length
Came slowly back to me the happy thought,

Yes—happy even 'mid such grief as mine:
My loved one needed help, and oh what joy
Was mine to give it, and I almost blessed
The form of his distress, that at the least
It did not keep me from him. For what woe
Unspeakable must be endured by those
Whose loved ones have been smitten, and who know
That they are suffering helpless and alone,
And that the same disease which tortures keeps
Apart from them the dear ones whose kind voice
And sympathetic touch is their chief stay.
If such a case of misery were mine,
Contagion's direst mischief I would brave
If I could thereby comfort those I love.

A chill received when heated and fatigued
One day in Summer's youth-time (when the breeze
Had Winter's breath still on it) was enough
To lay my Edgar low. Physicians came
And went, with faces grave and measured tread;
The case was serious, they said, and none
Could tell the issue. They were clever men

Nor meant to be unkind ; yet when I saw
Them watch his pangs of pain and laboured breathing
With interest all professional and cold,
It wellnigh made me mad.
The crisis came
And passed ;—the point once turned, he slowly gained
A little strength. The cautious doctors said
His youth would grapple on the side of life,
And he might yet recover. But for him
Should be no more of hard and brain-wrought toil
Or anxious eager thought :—his life must pass
In quiet,—and his winters he must spend
For several years abroad. Thus he will leave
Chill England's shores to-day. Ah cruel blast
And muddy cold grey sky that drives him from me!
Oh callous North-wind, couldst thou not restrain
Thy blighting force and let my darling live
In the same land as I ? Life-giving Sun,
Oh why dost thou not shine, when, if thou didst,
It would rejoice so many yearning hearts!

SCENE IV.

Early morning. EDGAR *standing on a balcony enjoying the fresh balmy air and watching the last traces of the sunrise die away in the sky.*

EDGAR.

So yesterday was Christmas-day, and yet
Such weather joyous and unwinter-like,—
In truth such weather as in recent years
We northerners but rarely have received
In sunless seasons which we summer call
Merely from force of custom.
Many trees
Retain their leaves—and fair it is to see
Green leaves at Christmas-time, while gorgeous flowers,
Which never bloom in Britain save when placed
In houses cramped and stifling with damp heat,
Display their beauty in the open air.
A few days since I saw—exquisite sight!

An avenue of fine camellia plants,
And all in fullest flower! and as I looked
Up the long vista while the luscious red
Commingled in my vision with the white,
And as I further gazed upon the scene
Of which they were the centre, and drank in
Its wondrous loveliness, I felt deep joy
That still amid its mingled pain and grief
Such sweetness is preserved on earth to soothe
And elevate men's thoughts. They who have lived
Only in climates where the fickle weather
Is changeful as the winds, can never know
The bliss of living where, come calm or storm,
No blighting blast can reach to wither up
Our vital energies and make our life
A misery. This is not such a clime
As Italy's in winter, where the sun
Makes summer as its warm rays penetrate,
But in the shade the cutting searching wind
Blows keenly from the snowy Apennines;
Nor such a clime as that whose azure waves
Reflect with dazzling force the Day-king's heat
Upon the olive-groves and pine-clad crags

Of the gay Riviera ;—but whose warmth
Dies with the day, and night is damp and
cold.
Here winds are never cold nor ever harm
With treacherous touch the trustful invalid,
Who, lured by the soft sunlight, walks abroad.
Here balmy night is pleasant and as mild
As is the day, while the defiled sea-shore
Appears, at least at night, most beautiful
Viewed from a distance ; and the dotted lights
From many a cottage on the lone crag-sides
Vie with the stars from out the deep blue sky
In forming a fair circlet round the bay
Like flashing jewels round the shapely arm
Of youth-dowered maid.
What were the lines I strung
Together, to employ an idle hour ?

Christmas in the summer sunshine ! O how beautiful it seems,—
Clothed in gladness are its moments, realizing poets' dreams,

While its hours pass swiftly from us, how we wish
they were for aye,
That their bright and buoyant pleasure with its
guilelessness might stay.

Christmas in the summer sunshine! softly blows
the scented breeze
And its coming stirs the frondage of the stately
staid palm-trees.
Calm the noble realm of Ocean, fair the dotted fish-
ing skiffs,
And the verdant cactus growing on the gaunt up-
rising cliffs.

All of Flora's cultured beauty freely is revealed to
view,
And among the vine-clad ridges of sweet wild-flowers
not a few,
Soft azaleas, rich gardenias, ope their blossoms to the
air,
With the rose, and trained geranium:—while its
wild type too is there.

Fitting the moon's glorious radiance for the people as they pass
On the eve of merry Christmas, to and from the midnight mass ;
And for strolling serenaders who invade the silent hours
With what doubtless they consider some of music's choicest flowers.

Christmas in the summer sunshine ! neither snow nor frost are here,
Which, though they may charm the healthy, fill the invalid with fear ;
And in sooth, with dear ones round him, spends he happily the day,
Pining not for that loved treasure—his chill home so far away.

Yet ! 'tis the far away that makes me sad,
For distance is indeed a barrier,
Let bards say what they will ; for though I *hope*
Hale health is coming back, I sometimes *feel*

As though I had not very long to live ;
And if 'tis so, it seems a cruel fate
To have to spend my few remaining days
So far away from those my heart holds dear,
But chiefly from the one my whole soul loves.

SCENE V.

A quiet spot in the garden of Edgar's home. Several months afterwards. EDGAR *and* ALETHEA.

EDGAR.

THE doctors think that I shall ne'er be well.
They do not say so openly, but still
It is not hard to understand the drift
Of their calm-spoken diplomatic phrases
About 'much care' and 'quiet' and 'escape
From English winters to the sunny south;'
And when I asked if my complaint were cured,
They hesitated, hemmed, then, smiling, said,
'Alleviated were the better term.'
Ah, it is hard to hear a cruel fate
Thus subtly hinted at in civil words
And courteous commonplaces, and to have
One's hopes annihilated in soft tones,
Meant to be pitiful, perchance, but which
Seem by their wily softness but to scorn

And counterfeit a kindness not heart-felt.
'Tis bitter to reflect my roll of years
Will probably be briefer than of those
My comrades—and no better men than I
(And this when life to me was ever sweet).
'Tis bitter to reflect that theirs may be
The bright career of steadfast earnest toil
Towards some right worthy goal, which, gained
at last,
Rewards them with a name, while unto me
'Tis given but to spend in listless calm
My few remaining days.
But bitterer still
It is, that I must loose you now, my love,
From cherished vows which we have interchanged.
For 'twere not right that I should link your fate
With mine as now it is, and bring perchance
On others—innocent—the hopeless bane
Of cureless sickness which I feel myself.
Grief is the rule of this our earthly life,
And joy but the exception ; wherefore then
Should I expect of joy a greater share
Than is apportioned unto thousands who
Have suffered, still are suffering, or will suffer

As helplessly as I :—and surely too
My mind should be far calmer than is his
Who sowed himself the seeds of his disease,
Whose every pang is now intensified
By keen remorse, and seething in whose soul
No thought save one—the ever-gnawing thought
But for himself what he would now have been.
Yet oh, Alethea, 'tis crushing grief
To lose you, darling, were it not my duty,
My duty thought and prayed about for weeks,
I could not say the word to set you free.

ALETHEA.

The word to set me free! that were indeed
Most difficult to say, for we are bound
Indissolubly :—and though, Edgar dear,
You tell me that for us all hope is o'er
Of earthly union : yet there still remains
A radiant future seen through mists of tears,
Since present life is not our whole existence.
Your name means 'happy honour,' and mine own
'Truth :'—if we live our little span of days
Worthy of such high names, it will be well

With us, whate'er may come. Yet when I look
On your poor face and mark the touch of pain,
Then, though I feel that doubtless you are right
In that you say, it makes me doubly sad
To think the fate that makes you suffer so,
Remorseless and unsatisfied, compels
You thus to blight your life; but if fond love
And sympathy can cheer, you yet may find
Some earthly joy remaining even to you.

SCENE VI.

Midwinter in a certain little island abroad. A pretty room with opened windows overlooking a lovely garden, and a still lovelier prospect beyond.

TIME.—*A few years afterwards, towards sunset, and only a few days before Edgar's death.* EDGAR *and* ALETHEA.

EDGAR.

TRULY a grand, a noble thing is life—
This most I feel when I am passing from it;
And life is fair, whatever cynics say.
But yesterday I lay upon my couch
And looked upon the clear wide-stretching bay,
Far, far beneath me shimmering in the sun.
I saw th' exquisite azure of the sky,
The dainty outlines of palm-branches shown
More clearly by the strong light showered upon them,
The countless clustering vines and varied trees
In all the gentle ever-pleasing glow

Of vegetation almost tropical,
Which makes each cultivated garden here
Appear a paradise. Banana-trees
I saw with all their load of luscious fruit
The graceful guava-trees with light-green leaves
The loquats with their deeper verdant tints,—
The little plant they call 'Brazilian cherry,'
With bright green leaves, and fruit of strawberry
size,—
The stately yam-tree with its blossoms white
And lily-like;—fair to the eye indeed,
A tree whose oval leaves afford good shade
In summer. Surely it is strangely sweet
To loiter in such gardens when cool Night
Has conquered the fierce ardour of the day,—
And see the meek moon rise o'er azure seas,—
And view the tranquil heavens don their jewels,
And hear machêtes[1] swift tingling forth an air
Of music,—haply a soft mazy dance.
Yet, dear Alethea, it is decreed
That I must leave you, darling, but although
'Tis sad to leave you and this beauteous world,
'Tis sweet to die amid such loveliness.

[1] Portuguese guitars.

And daily I thank God that He hath not
Condemned me to this sickness slow and sure
Immured in one close room from day to day,
Through the long, lagging, weary winter-time,
But given me the means wherewith to dwell
In climate such as this where balmy air
And sunshine even in winter, are not wanting;
A climate where the invalid can pass,
However languid, many happy hours
Communing with God's fair earth out of doors.
Do you remember, dear, some years ago
You told me if fond love and sympathy
Could soothe me that I surely should be cheered?
And you have kept your word: I have been
cheered,
And comforted, and though no marriage-bond
Has been between us as we once had hoped,
Our souls have been as one. Take my poor thanks
For coming thus to sojourn where I dwelt
And giving me your loving tireless care
'Mid all my pain and suffering, made less hard
To bear by your kind presence.

ALETHEA.

I am glad
It was my lot to render you this service,—
A service small indeed compared with love
Such as I bear you, darling.

EDGAR.

When I die,
Let me be buried in my native land,
Not here, although I love this sea-girt shore,
Where graveyards are embowered mid beauteous trees,
And overlook mayhap light rippling waves
As blue as the deep azure heavens above them,
Round whose rude tombs the scented roses cling.
And still bloom on throughout the sunny year.
But let me rather lie where chilling rain
And bitter sleet shall in the winter-time
Beat on my resting-place. For what care I
Though placid snows spread o'er my quiet grave
Their spotless mantle, though wild wintry winds

Sweep o'er it, be it only undisturbed.
And if 'twere here, perchance it would not be
For ever left in peace. Alethea,
For *Time* we shall be separated soon,
But do not grieve o'ermuch. For me 'twill be
A glad release from pain, and you and I
Shall meet in yon pure Home of Love at last.

VERSES OF TRAVEL.

VERSES OF TRAVEL.

A BISCAYAN SUNSET.

April 17th, 1879.

A golden halo gilds the sky,
And the wind-unruffled sea,
A scene it is where poet's eye
Could subtle loveliness descry
Unweariedly.

Hark! from afar the deep-toned roar
Of the Atlantic surge—
Yon sail will soon be seen no more
Now light-illumed: 'tis fleeting o'er
The sea-scape's verge.

The stars appear—strange visions rise;
Of man's dim destiny
How typical are these calm skies!
While like to man the sad sea lies
Troubled though free.

No wingèd wanderer slowly cleaves
The silence in his flight;—
His burning throne the Warmth-King leaves
While the fair firmament receives
The crown'd Queen Night.

AFTER SUNSET OFF PAUILLAC, FRANCE.

April 18th, 1879.

Day hath departed, save a few faint streaks
Of light that fleck the bosom of the sky ;
These, and these only, stay to testify
Of proud Night's conquest. Hark ! that sound bespeaks
Our nearness to the Ocean, and I see
Its ripples at my feet ;—a soft clear song
Is breeze-borne from a vessel's deck along.
The crew with musical monotony
Raise anchor swiftly, and the ship doth glide
In silence, save for the chant growing low
Wave-wafted landwards. Little doth she know
If calms will come, or fiercest storms betide :—
Alas, o'er life's strange sea we all must sail
Like her, nor know if calm or tempest will prevail.

ON A DISTANT PROSPECT OF THE PYRENEES.

MAJESTIC snow-crowned mountains distant far,
Yet to man's seeming near! How oft we feel
In life 'tis even thus! though there the view,
That seems so close before us full and fair,
May ne'er be realized, while here it needs
But purpose long-sustained to gain the goal
And prove the seeming real.
Whilst I gaze
Upon your cloud-capt summits, thoughts arise
Telling of eager spirits not a few
Who like to me have looked in ages past,
Filled with the selfsame dream of human change,
And your immutability compared
With man's brief mundane course. How many too
Have lounged and looked on your cloud-piercing peaks,
Nor felt the deep reflection such a scene

Is fitted well to give! Strange! but 'tis so,
And will be ever while the world endures;
That which to one seems passion-fraught, sublime,
Another views,—deems fine,—and passes on.

ON SEEING SOME PYRENEAN WILD ROSES.

May 17th, 1879.

How sweet the sight of roses
In an English lane in June,
When every flower reposes
Beneath the tranquil moon!

How strange the sight of roses,
Albeit they are wild,—
Seen where a valley closes,
And mountains huge are piled!

Upon whose sides remaining
Is strewn the purest snow,
Still by its presence chaining
The tide of Spring's soft glow.

Yes, wondrous seems completely
A contrast such as this,
And yet, 'tis ordered meetly
And cannot be amiss ;—

For God has kept the pureness
Of snow upon the hill,
The roses in secureness
To flourish, too, at will.

THE SOUTHERN NIGHT.

AH! how unlike the Southern night
To that of Northern skies,
Where tedious twilight mocks its flight
And day but slowly dies!
For there pale Eve's star-studded veil
O'er all is swiftly cast,
Peace seemeth wafted on the gale;—
Care for a while is past.

Chorus.

O! the mellow Southern summer's night,
How sweet it is to stray
Mid scenes which the moonbeam's fairy light
Makes lovelier far than day!

How fair the widely-stretching woods,
That clothe the spacious plain;
While Silence, queen-like, o'er them broods
In solitary reign:—

How fair the river's crystal thread,
Seen faintly from afar,
And glimmering pure as on it shed
Are gleams from many a star!

Chorus.

O! the mellow Southern summer's night, etc.

How fair perchance the mountains lie,
Though distant wondrous clear,
Their snow-wrapt peaks against the sky
Viewed dimly tier on tier;—
How fair the sleeping landscape seems,
While here and there are heard
Sounds breathing music's softest dreams
Or laughter-laden word!

Chorus.

O! the mellow Southern summer's night, etc.

A DIRGE OF DECAY.

Near Argelez in the Department of the Hautes Pyrénées, France, are several ruins of old castles said to have been built by the English in the 15th century.

WITHIN these walls
Now half-forgotten, lonely and decayed,
Only the birds their resting-place have made,
And scarce a step within them ever falls.

Yet doubtless here
Stupendous deeds of valour have been wrought,—
Deeds that to many thousands then were fraught
With heart-felt weal or deep and direful fear.

Brave of the brave
Our soldiers must assuredly have been,
So long to hold for our proud Island-queen
This land which then seemed far across the wave.

Yes, far from aid,
From friends, from home, must have appeared their lot,
And yet (O courage great!) they faltered not,
Nor, filled with craven terror, were afraid;

Not even though
Full oft encompassed, like unto a stag
By hounds engirt; but rallied round their flag,
And kept its honour stainless from the foe.

Why is it then
That low in ruins are these castles laid?
It is because old courage had decayed,—
It is because old fire had left our men.

This should we learn
While earth remaineth thus,—wars cannot cease;
That everything hath limits,—even peace;
So let the lamp of ancient courage burn.

LINES ON LOOKING UP THE VALE OF BARÉGES FROM ST. SAUVEUR, HAUTES PYRÉNÉES, FRANCE.

Lo! what a glorious prospect is revealed
Of mountains, snow, and verdant loveliness;
Upon the sloping sides of monarch heights
Reposes now the mist, most gracefully,
In wreaths almost transparent; presently
Its mass divides, and clear against the sky
Appears each giant summit grandly calm,
And seeming proud that its lone God-wrought strength
So long defies decay. One ever feels
In gazing on such scenes how weak is man,
Yet still how much his art hath made increase
To this rare store of beauty. Each small patch
Perceived upon the mountain-side, reclaimed

From barren wilderness, hath wondrous power
To cheer the eye. To me it often seems
As though no prospect were indeed complete
Without some trace of toil to leaven it.

FROM LA RAILLÈRE
TO PONT D'ESPAGNE AND LAC DE GAUBE.

O PATH which seems to have a loveliness
More than of Earth,
How can one who has viewed thy scenes express
The thoughts that unto them have owed their birth?

How can he tell of all the wondrous way
Where grandeur vies
With beauty, rich and rare, to bear the sway
In winning and retaining ravished eyes?

How can he tell of rocks and ridges wild
Which lie around?
Of mighty mountain-peaks on high up-piled?
Of ceaseless cataracts' majestic sound?

How can he well describe rich-foliaged trees
That screen the sides?
Blown to and fro by gentle summer breeze,—
In chasms where the vale the rocks divides.

How can he well describe the stately pines
Steadfast and strong?
(True type of one whose sun not always shines,
And yet who bravely bears grief's load along.)

High-foaming Cérizet can he portray?
Beyond the power
Of language even feebly to convey
Its peerless beauty, wonder-working dower.

Much less the wilder falls at Pont d'Espagne
Truly sublime,—
Whose weird white floods sing songs of sturdy strain,
For aye the same in nature-ordered time.

When Lac de Gaube is reached, how can he tell
The silent sight
Of snow and glaciers? Soon our bosoms swell
With feelings half of fear, half of delight.

The fairy rainbow tints which o'er the falls
Glimmer and play,
The stilly clearness of the lake enthralls,
Yes this and all, in us soon holds full sway.

Though none can well describe these scenes, shall not
They in the mind
Remain to bring forth fruit, a gladsome spot
In memory, a gift for good designed!

ON LOOKING UP THE VALE OF CAUTERETS BY NIGHT.

THE Night is here,
Yet gazing pensively
Into its gloom, a vista strangely clear
In outline soft we see.

The mountain forms
In solemn grandeur rise,
Each summit still the strength of countless storms
For countless years defies.

The dark-green pines
Clothe nearly all around.
How lone the slopes on which each cold star shines!
Nor doth a single sound

Invade the calm,—
Or by its presence melt
The sense of awe and vastness, like a charm
Deeply, profoundly felt.

SONNET

On seeing a Sham Fight of French Troops at Orthez, in exactly the same position as those occupied by the English and French Armies in the memorable action of February 14th, 1814.

A FEBRUARY day in years long fled,
A fiercely raging battle hour by hour,
At length gained by a mind of mighty power
Through wonder-working skill.
French troops are spread
Along the ridge of hills and fertile vales
Where that stern strife was once. For mimic war
They are arranged precisely as of yore,
Is the result as in the old men's tales
Who saw the real conflict? Nay, not so,
The French now hold the heights. Fictitious foes
Are beaten by the patriots who oppose.
'The English hounds who wrought our pride's o'erthrow,'
Doubtless thinks many a soldier, 'now would feel,
If they were here once more, the force of Frenchmen's steel.'

THE CITY OF THE CID.—1879.

BURGOS, once city of the Cid, all hail!
Thou standest in the plain of old Castile,
An interest in the land which one can feel
Although no more is heard the clang of mail

Within thy grass-grown streets. For though no doubt
The hand of Change is working, yet it seems
To me as if thou wert but in my dreams
Inwove with sound of arms and warlike shout.

How noble thy cathedral's gorgeous pile!
How quaint its frescoed front! These carvèd forms,
Here sculptured, had their life as many storms
Of care as ours throughout its weary while?

These images of saints within, whose life,
Judging but from their features, seemed all calm,
Had they than we more nearly reached that balm
Which Christians find the antidote of strife?

No! Life was doubtless then a darker thing
Than now it is. For certainly our lives
Are moulded by our faith. He only thrives
Whose faith is true of flight and strong of wing.

And theirs though firm could never have been true,
Since it forbade the only Light to shine
Which shows the truth on Earth, that Light divine,
By which God means that man his course shall view,

And haply change if needful. Thoughts like these
Come as strange fruit seen first 'neath alien skies,

As now I gaze around. Rich musings rise
While looking on thee, Burgos,—some which please

And some which sadden. When at close of day
I stand in thy cathedral's solemn shades
Among its peerless chapels, none invades,
To break the sacred calm of aisle and bay.

THE ESCORIAL, 1879.

THE Escorial, a glooming pile, standing at the foot of the Guadarrama range of mountains, is the burial-place of the Spanish Kings, and it is so vast that it looks imposing even amid natural grandeur.

HOW sternly the Escorial stands,—
The burial-place of kings,
Who at disloyal Death's commands
Must leave their princely things,

And hie to this stupendous pile,
That looks so cold and lone,—
Where nature scarcely dares to smile,[1]
And verdure seems unknown,—

[1] The Sierra de Guadarrama are immediately behind the Escorial. Their peaks are arid and bare, and the adjacent country is almost treeless, and burnt up by the sun in summer.

To this sad spot where Summer's glare
Beats fiercest and most strong,—
Where swooping from his mountain lair
Winter abideth long.

Ah, yes, it must be change indeed
From grandeur[1] such as theirs
To such a spot to come with speed,
To be Corruption's heirs.

For evermore to lay aside
Insignia of power,—
All-humbled stately monarch pride
In death's still awful hour.

And yet 'twere better thus to be
Entombed 'mid marble[2] walls,

[1] The royal palace of Madrid is reputed to be the finest in Europe.

[2] Each king and queen's coffin is placed in a niche in the wall of a chamber reserved for the remains of sovereigns who have reigned and their wives.

A slab is placed over the niche, and name and date inscribed on it. The chamber, whose walls are of marble, is shown to visitors.

Where even his foot who comes to see
In seeming reverence falls,

Than to be huddled with the rest
In some dank burial-ground,
Where in a few years' time at best
One's place could not be found.[1]

Men prate that Nature ne'er obtains
Her long-predestined dues,
And show that we with mighty pains
Should alter all our views

On points of sepulchre. For me,
Though o'er it fall Oblivion's frost,
I trust for aye my grave shall be
Neither disturbed nor lost.

[1] On the Continent—infamous custom!—unless the ground is purchased in perpetuity, the remains of those interred are removed after five or ten years,—*where*, it were not well to say,—and the plot of land prepared for others.

TOLEDO IN 1879.

TOLEDO! what a mint of memories,
Of olden tale and legend, round the name
Are clustered! Mingled with such dreams as these
Come flashes of its brilliant blades of fame.

How proudly must old kings in joy have thought
Of their fair city fitted to be great,
Placed on a hill, by streams surrounded! Naught,
Deemed they, can alter now its high estate.

Ah! most imperial it must once have seemed,
When capital of many a mighty power,
And Spanish sunshine in its fierceness gleamed
On lofty battlement and soaring tower.

In days when from the 'Sun-gate'[1] oft at morn
Issued a goodly Moorish martial train

[1] The 'Puerta del Sol,' a still-remaining Moorish gateway, is one of the finest relics of old Toledo.

Of turbaned knights, ere starting sternly sworn
To conquer for the Crescent more of Spain.

With scimitars unsheathed swift rode they forth,
Not seldom causing terror all around
Among the peasants,—as towards the north
They rode, with Burgos[1] as their utmost bound.

Then afterwards returning, Victory
Attendant on their standards, with what joy
Would comrades greet them who had come to see
Night's cooling wings Day's sultriness destroy!

And when the sixth Alonso[2] conquered it,
Forcing it back into the Christian fold,
Made statelier still, 'twas deemed the seat of wit,
Its people's speech the nation's purest mould.[3]

[1] Burgos was then the Christian capital of Spain.

[2] There is an anachronism here which it is hoped will be pardoned for the sake of the symmetry of the piece. Alonso VI. flourished in the eleventh century, Cervantes in the fourteenth.

[3] 'To speak *en propro Toledano* has since the time of Cervantes been equivalent to *the best Spanish*.'

When in more recent days the Spanish name
Had grown the most renowned of all the world,
St. Quentin and Lepanto knew the aim
Of keen Toledan darts at foemen hurl'd.

All these reflections come in ceaseless train,
While gazing sadly on its fell decay.
I feel not shame that it has given me pain
To think its relics soon must pass away.

Farewell, far-famed Toledo! I shall ne'er
Forget thy mien,—appearing as indeed
Plunged in the deepest sleep. Few could repair
Spain's ancient cities; Life is what they need.

LINES

ON PASSING IN AN EXPRESS TRAIN THROUGH BADAJOZ, NOTED FOR ITS FAMOUS SIEGE DURING THE PENINSULAR WAR.

AND is this Badajoz? where once was heard
The clash of arms, and breaching cannons' roar,
Where from the dim-lit parallels came forth
The forlorn hope at Duty's stern command?
Where swords and bayonets bristled on cold walls,
And multitudes of marksmen sought to stay
The assailing columns in their onward course?
Where, when the town was gained, grim Plunder stalked
Amid its devastated streets, and made
Them ghastlier even than War?
Years yield strange fruit
Of alteration in forsaken paths;
Yet was I strangely struck with the great change
Wrought here in Badajoz.
Can it be true
That here a most prosaic railway-station
Is now erected, with its telegraph,

Poor restaurant, and porters to be 'tipped'?
And that of travellers, who tread its platform
When trains a moment stop, scarce any think
Of that bold siege which for all coming years
Has blazoned 'Badajoz' on Fame's high scroll?

MOONLIGHT ON THE TAGUS.

'Tis moonlight on the Tagus! A full flood
Of soft-spun sparkling radiance dowers the whole
With dazzling splendour,—save where shadows lie
Upon the river's bosom, sheltering
The coward Darkness now a while dethroned
By the Moon's great, though seeming gentle might,
Ah me, how beautiful! Deep azure sky,
Deep azure sea, and steadfast-beaming stars,—
A dreamy blissful languor stealeth fast
Over my soul, whilst gazing musingly
Upon this prospect steeped in rapt repose,—
And I forget the busy throng of life
Which it presents by day,—and almost now
I could imagine it some magic realm
Enchanted in far fairy land, beyond
The power of mortal reach.
But soon a voice
Says, 'Supper's come at last, let's eat and then to bed.'

CINTRA IN 1879.

CINTRA,[1] our Byron gave thy name to fame
By his description grand, and sweet, and true ;
But though thy 'mountain's ever beauteous brow'
And many other objects are unchanged,
Yet altered are full many of the scenes
On which the poet looked, and mused and sang.
No 'frugal monks their little relics show'
To strangers at 'Our Lady's house of woe.'
One sees their tiny cells, their cork-wood walls,
Honorius's cave, and that is all.
The former home of 'England's wealthiest son'
No longer has its 'portals gaping wide,'
Its 'halls deserted,' or great 'giant weeds'
Within its garden ground :—but it is fair,
Fair as the lordly traveller declared
It was of yore. While 'Marialva's dome'
Is changed in that 'tis now historical,

[1] See *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, canto I.

Its fame a lasting one, whilst in his day
Its interest was eclipsed by other themes
Of ever-varying War:—the deed performed
Within its gates too recent not to be
Left unto record of the daily gossip,
And comments of the press which rarely live.
All now is different:—a classic scene
Thou standest, Cintra, clothed with more of fame
(To English minds at least) from Byron's words
Than from thy matchless beauty, could that be.
And mayhap, in the years to come, some poet
Treading the self-same scenes will tell how one,
A writer of poor verses, tried to tell
What changes there had been since Byron wrote;
And he, in turn, with glowing eloquence
Will paint with poet's art the tide of Change
On Cintra since these lines were given forth.

VERSES

On a vase filled with beautiful Roses, Camellias and other flowers, with different sprays of plants, grown in the open air at Madeira, in December.

EXQUISITE flowers!
Come ye to tell of summer hours,
Of balmy breeze, of lengthened days,
Of warblers' wondrous lays?

Thus come ye not,
For not in summer lies your lot,
No lengthened days attend your birth
Nor songsters' merry mirth.

Yet gentle gales
Are near, and sunshine stills prevails,
As in frail loveliness ye lie
Too soon, alas! to die.

Ah fair, how fair,
Here nature worketh everywhere,—
If thus in winter sweet to see,
What must the spring-time be!

And yet, although
All plants enchant in tropic glow,
Upon the zephyrs is not spent
The wealth of fragrant scent

Of England's flowers.
Only the rose from Britain's bowers
Retains its perfume. No! oh no!
Naught equals the pure glow

Of England's spring!
When every floweret seems to bring
New sweets to blend with the soft breeze
Among the blossoming trees.

Yet 'tis a power,
This grandeur of each plant and flower,
To make the poet's heart rejoice
And sing with gladsome voice

Of what he feels ;
Yet rarely even he reveals
The radiant wealth of blissful thought
Such flowers to him have brought.

A LESTÉ[1] SUNRISE IN MADEIRA.

MANY-hued the sky this morn,
Beautiful the day is born,
Fleecy clouds on every side
Sunshine's coming seem to hide,
But the other cloudlets stand
Ready waiting its command.

Ay, they are a gorgeous group,
Almost each tint in the troop,
Red, and light blue, and maroon,
And some white appearing soon,
And a glorious purple shade
Over all is deftly laid.

[1] The Lesté is a south-east wind felt in Madeira, and frequently prevalent for several days. At the beginning or close of a Lesté the sunrises and sunsets are superb.

O'er the mountains purple clouds
Of deep colour hang, like shrouds ;
Purple masses faint are shed
O'er the Ocean's wave-strewn bed,
Fine the light which now one sees,
On the palms and tropic trees.

Swiftly fades the splendid sky
To a dimly purple dye ;
Gently stirs the landward breeze
Shapely-formed banana-trees.
Dawn's first freshness wears away,
And begins the balmy day.

MADEIRA—MOONLIGHT.

STEALING softly o'er the mountains,
  Skirting Funchal's scattered town,
To the eastward, comes the moonlight
  Flinging its effulgence down;
Making every object glitter
  In its clear and tranquil sheen,
While the Ocean lately troubled
  Seemeth lapt in peace serene.

Subtle moonlight! how thy radiance
  With a magic often shown
Touches and refines a landscape
  With a glamour all thine own!
So thou causest here the houses
  Mean, nay squalid, in the light,
To appear a pearly pureness
  Rather than a dirty white.

For the filth and streets so narrow,
With vile odours bred by day,
Save for Nature's glorious grandeur,
Takes admiring thoughts away;
But the moonbeam maketh all things
Gain at least a semblance meet,
Till at length the wide-spread prospect
Has an aspect almost sweet.

AT SANTA CRUZ DE TENERIFE.

Feb. 19, 1880.

'Tis fashionable now to say
That skill displayed in war is wrong,
That they who formed our England's sway,
And made her empire firm and strong,

Were callous cut-throats nothing less,—
Who joyed in war for its own sake,—
Who yearned to banish happiness,
Who loved with blood their thirst to slake.

And yet while landing here to-day,
On the same shore which years ago
Saw from its crag-encircled bay
Our Nelson's only overthrow,

I thought, Do those who grub and prose,
And by their lights their betters try,
Perform their life-tasks more than those
Whose task is but 'to do or die'?

SUNDAY MORNING OFF MAZAGAN, MOROCCO.

March 14, 1880.

STRANGE spreading town of gleaming white
Girt round with sand and seething spray!
A magic city, Fancy-dight,
Thou seemest this calm Sabbath-day.

Within thy walls can be discerned
The flat-roofed orient dwelling-place,—
And near are wells, whose wheels are turned
By pensive camel's steadfast pace.

Dark Moors in their fantastic dress,
In haste to reach us, leave the shore,—
And soon they make the distance less,
So strong the stroke of their long oar.

Now they have gained us, most with pride
Disdain the aid that steps afford,

Bare feet from heel-less slippers glide,
And, cat-like, swift they spring on board.

All speak at once with gestures quaint,
And few but in an unknown tongue.
Those in the boats take up the plaint,
And on the deck still more have sprung.

Ours is the only ship, save one,
That near to us at anchor rides,
And she content with work well done
Is waiting till to-morrow's tides.

And from her mizen-mast there floats
That flag so dear to British heart,—
The flag whose mingled hue denotes
A union naught should ever part.

A welcome standard! it appears
A pleasant sign that even here
Are some who share our hopes and fears,
Who pray like us, like us revere.

GIBRALTAR.

1880.

'SWEET Seville'[1] has been sung—and Cadiz too
By Byron,[2] for the beauty of her girls,—
Yet know I not that one hath given thy due
To thee on whose proud crest the cloud-wreath curls.

Let me attempt thy praise, then, for I know
That worthier pens will write of foreign towns,—
For now no place has praise with us, if so
It be mayhap a jewel of our Crown's.

'Sweet Seville's' Guadalquivir, famed in song,
Is nothing save a nearly stagnant stream.[3]

[1] See 'Seville,' by J. E. Carpenter.
[2] Vide Lord Byron's song, 'The Girl of Cadiz.'
[3] Except when in flood.

The beauty of the Cadiz maiden throng
Exists,—but in a 'poet's airy dream.'

Here in Gibraltar all retains an air
Of honest truth. Odourless streets are clean,
And everything is made the most of, where
Man's art avails to soften down the scene.

The gardens of the Alameda, full
Of semi-tropic plants and shady trees,
Pleasant to lounge in their recesses cool
On summer eves to catch the soft sea-breeze.

Yet great the toil and patience must have been
Before at last was made such rocky ground
To nourish shrub, or plant, or aught of green.
Cheering it is to hear the home-like sound

Of English tongues,—to see our cared-for men,—
Contrasted with the Spaniards wan and weak,
Guarding their posts, as they with eager ken
Look on our cannon, which have but to speak—

To put their lines to rout.[1] How lovely gleams
The Rock at sunrise! The grey looming clouds
Glow in the new-born light like glorious dreams,
While Shadow still the tranquil bay enshrouds.

Ay, grim Gibraltar, thou indeed art fair!
And more than that, a place in which one may
Live with true home-like comfort, and a share
Of a good climate, brightening Life's dull day.

[1] A conspicuous row of white stone sentry-boxes are erected at the extremity of Spanish territory, and from them Spanish soldiers continually watch us. Doubtless they are within easy range of our artillery, and it is equally certain that were we to fire on them, they have no guns in position with which to answer us.

GRANADA.

FAIR Granada, our masters of the pen
Have written much of thee, and not a few
Who ne'er have seen thee, hold dream-wrought and fair,
A city in their fancy by thy name
Seen clearly in their mental eyes, as if
'Twere mirrored in their senses. Thus with me ;
But when I saw, my fond ideal fell.
It was not that thy famed Alhambra hill
Lacked grandeur, or its silent courts were void
Of architectural wealth, or that the Vega,[1]
Shut in by mountains and the silent snows,[2]
Was aught save fair ; yet still the impression stays
Unceasingly within me, caused perchance
By narrow Spanish streets, dull, dirty, white,

[1] The plain of Granada.
[2] Of the Sierra Nevada.

Or likelier that the sight of scaffoldings
And fresh-wrought antique work amid the old
In the Alhambra's courts[1] destroy their charm.

[1] The Spanish government long neglected the Alhambra, but, finding it a source of revenue by the attraction of visitors, they have begun to renew it. Doubtless therefore, in a few years, much of what is thought to be ancient will in reality be quite modern. Two examples will suffice. I myself saw a boy putting up some frescoes in exact imitation of the Moorish workmanship, and new ears have been given to some of the stone lions so recently (April, 1880) that the colour has not yet had time to assimilate to that of the other portion of the images to which they belong.

PALMS BY MOONLIGHT AT ALICANTE.

PALMS by moonlight! Waving palms,
How each thought of you embalms
In memory the spot whereon I saw you last!

Wonderfully, softly clear,—
Did you on that night appear,
Each branch, each leaf, distinct in strange ethereal sheen.

Scarce like Europe seemed that scene,—
Where the eye rich hues could glean,
Cheering the mind as doth a gentle soothing dream.

But like mellow Eastern tale,
In which genii ride the gale,
Stealing among such trees on mystic errands sent.

Soon the sweet and glowing sight
Made romantic with delight
My heart, as on its radiance I fondly gazed.

Whilst 'mid heaven of purest blue
The calm moon her glances threw
Upon these palms, soft visions floating came,—

Orient sentiments that stole
Swiftly, thrilling through my soul,
Their keenly subtle power how deeply strongly felt!

And with ravished eye and heart
Wished I never to depart.
Looking, I longed to live, and see such scene for ever.

A SPOT IN SWITZERLAND.

A SILVERN haze is over all. At hand
Are gently swaying poplars, rippling larches
And firmly rooted firs,—while further off
Gleam azure waters of a waveless lake.
Beyond again are mountains ; not, as oft,
Gaunt snow-capped monarch peaks,—but bright with verdure.
The rocks cast shadows quaint upon the grass,
White châlets peep from mid close clustering vines ;
Gay boats glide gently on with buoyant sail
Widely outspread. The scene though not sublime
Seems full of happiness and calm content.

LINES

SUGGESTED BY SEEING A SMALL GREY STONE ON THE ROAD,
AT THE SUMMIT OF THE SIMPLON PASS,
SEPTEMBER 14TH, 1880.

QUAINT little common stone! Strange may have
been
Existence with you for full many a year.—
A world of changes you perchance have seen,—
Although tormented by no heart-wrought fear,
No soul-distress, nor sorrow's blinding tear.

What direful tempests may have passed you by
When mid the riven mountains thunder rolled,
And sent his messengers athwart the sky,—
The rushing storm-clouds of shapes manifold
Which in deep darkness the horizon hold

Until his wrath is o'er. The silent snows
May oft have lain upon you, when the hands
Of winter framed his lofty couch, and chose
The glaciers for his lair. His dread commands
How ghastly ever make the higher lands

Doubtless in midnight hour, when tranquil stars
Shine down on snow-drifts, on the glaciers lone,
And on snow-laden pines: when nothing mars
The wondrous scene to human eye scarce known:
Where Nature rears mid rocks her frost-bound throne.

Yet for how many ages year by year
Such prospects you have seen! Perceiving too
Sun-risings and sun-settings the most clear
And most magnificent, the loveliest hue
Of Nature never hidden from your view.

Near you, may be, have wandered weary men
Mid fierce storm-battles fought on wintry nights;—
Near you, perchance, have happened now and then
Most wondrous things, more strange and curious sights
Than sages know who are the world's most lustrous lights.

Yet now you 're broken up to make the road
A poor despisèd chip! And haply too
You will be useless in your new abode,
And in the nook, where heedlessly man threw
You as he passed, shrink from his callous view.

THE CERTOSA OF PAVIA;

A GREAT ITALIAN CONVENT, AND GRAND WORK OF ART.

GREAT monument of human skill!
How vast must be the power and scope
Of minds which can conceive,—of hands
That shape such edifices rare;
And doth the splendid sight not show
Convincingly how wondrous is
The grandeur, mightiness of Man,
Despite his body frail, and train
Of weary woes, which almost ever
Attends him, ere king Death with sway
Imperious demands his spoil?
And do such sights not educate
(If we may phrase it thus) the soul,
Leading us far more to believe
In the proud majesty of Art?
The marble cuttings exquisite

Near the high altar, the mosaics
Gorgeous—yet though so finely wrought,
Designed in truly simple taste,
The stately stalls of workmanship
Replete with loveliness and rich
In cunning inlaid work. The aspect
Of the exterior, the carvings
So realistic near the door—
The outer door—of Roman coins
(Though strange to see these Pagan heads)
At entrance to a Christian Church.
All, all make up a noble whole,
And fill the heart with feelings which
'Twere better that it ne'er forgot.

Foolscap 8vo, extra cloth, Price 2s. 6d.

'The Keeping of the Vow and other Verses.'

BY H. T. MACKENZIE BELL.

LONDON: ELLIOT STOCK, 62 PATERNOSTER ROW, E.C.

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another favourable specimen. . . . Sweet and soothing verses. . . . We come on another very fine piece in a "Dream of Long Ago," which will strike a chord of sympathy in many a traveller down the hill of life as it calls up the scenes of long-past youth. We have only just room to pick out one other plum, it is the "Apostrophe to an Ink Bottle in the Hotel Coffee-Room." All the ideas and associations are ingeniously conceived, and skilfully woven together.' —DORSET COUNTY CHRONICLE, *October 2d*, 1879.

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